DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 473 494 CS 511 793

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TITLE	Assessing Early Reading: Change, Culture, and Community in a Pacific Island School. PREL Briefing Paper.
INSTITUTION	Pacific Resources for Education and Learning, Honolulu, HI.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	PB0205
PUB DATE	2002-11-00
NOTE	21p.
CONTRACT	ED01CO0014
AVAILABLE FROM	Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL), 900 Fort Street Mall, Suite 1300, Honolulu, HI 96813. Tel: 808-441-1300; Fax: 808-441-1385; e-mail: askprel@prel.org; Web site: http://www.prel.org.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Community Support; *Evaluation Methods; Grade 1; *Literacy; Nongovernmental Organizations; Oral Tradition; Primary Education; Program Descriptions; *Reading Instruction; Rural Schools; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS	Pacific Islands

ABSTRACT

Children enter grade 1 at an island school in Kosrae, Micronesia with a rich oral language and very little experience with print. One of the main tasks of teachers is to help children become literate. However, the literacy and assessment practices in this early grade classroom are limited and unquestioned. In determining how best to teach early reading in Pacific schools, teachers are faced with limited classroom resources, minimal assessments in the local language, and infrequent staff development. Relying on themselves (the principal and teachers), the community, the central office staff, and the support of a non-governmental agency, one rural school in the Pacific committed to a process of change. This paper chronicles the first year of that change--how one school, situated within a community of dominant oral traditions and a lingering colonial past, engaged in changing school literacy practices, including shifting its focus from assessment of learning to assessment for learning in early reading classrooms. (Contains 3 tables and 27 references.) (PM)

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PREL Briefing Paper

November 2002

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ED 473 494

Assessing Early Reading: Change, Culture, and Community in a Pacific Island School

By Marylin Low, Winton Clarence, and Keti William*

One year ago...

At a Pacific island school just before lunch, grade 1 children sat in their assigned seats while their teacher read them a story from her desk at the front of the room. They did not ask questions or comment. While the story was being told, a sudden downpour of tropical rain temporarily muted the teacher's voice. In the dampness and ensuing gusts of wind, the three papers taped to the wall fell limp to the floor and the pages of the few books on the shelf began to curl. At the end of the story, the children turned to the only print material on their desk, a worksheet they needed to complete and have marked by their teacher. They knew if they finished early, they could draw and color. This was a familiar routine within the daily 45-minute reading block. That day, however, the teacher tried something new. Once the children finished their worksheet, she called them to her desk, one at a time. Unsure of how they would respond, she asked them to tell her about the story she just read.

At this island school in Kosrae, Micronesia, children enter grade 1 with a rich oral language and very little experience with print, especially in the local language (L1). One of the main tasks of teachers is to help children become literate, an obvious necessity for success in school. However, the literacy[1] and assessment practices in this early grade classroom are what the New London Group (2000) call a "carefully restricted project" (p. 9); that is, in this case, a limited and limiting view of literacy and its assessment has been formalized and perpetuated through established routines.[2] As commonly practiced routines, they often go unquestioned and are passed down from generation to generation as the way reading "gets done." Yet, the routine described above creates at-risk conditions

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in which children struggle as readers, especially those children who come to school with little, if any, preparation for learning to read (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Changing those conditions so that teachers and parents are willing to experiment and take risks with new literacy and assessment practices in their homes and classrooms takes time. We know not everyone is ready for change. Nonetheless, Allington and Cunningham (2002) remind us that in every school there is at least one teacher (and, we hope, at least one parent) ready to engage in the change process. The teacher in the classroom above may be that one.

Currently, a concerted effort at the federal level focuses on improving the reading achievement of all children. President Bush's initiative, the *No Child Left Behind* Act of 2001 (NCLB), fronts this effort and draws attention to evidenced-based research in the field of reading (National Reading Panel, 2000). Much of the research attempts to better understand and make more explicit assessing, teaching, and learning to read. The research is often situated in school contexts that focus on learning to read in English (including implied shared cultural beliefs associated with English) and have access to appropriate classroom resources and regular staff development. In determining how best to teach early reading in Pacific schools in which the language of instruction is not English, teachers are faced with limited classroom resources, minimal assessments in the local language, and staff development that is infrequently provided. Relying on themselves (the principal and teachers), the community, the central office staff, and the support of a non-governmental agency (NGO), one rural school in the Pacific committed to a process of change.

This paper chronicles the first year of that change – how one school, situated within a community of dominant oral traditions and a lingering colonial past, has engaged in changing school literacy practices, including shifting its focus from assessment *of* learning to include assessment *for* learning in early reading classrooms (Stiggins, 2002). Motivated by the promise of using assessments to "produce significant, and often substantial, learning gains" (Black, 2001, p. 11), the staff and community became involved in the development of early reading assessments in L1. This involvement and classroom teachers' subsequent use of the assessments was an important first step in changing literacy practices at school.

For a remote, Pacific island school with just one class in each of grades 1 through 9 and with few reading resources in L1, the community has become an important language-culture resource. The significance of community-school connections, especially as it relates to literacy, is obvious. Yet, what happens in communities where parents have cultured their children in the richness of oral language, where print is not a necessary condition for the way life is lived? Viewed as important resources in support of the change process, parents and other community members were invited to participate in literacy conversations and activities that impacted their connection with the school. Over time the principal, with the support of the NGO staff, drew on the strong community support to build a distinctive "pedagogy of place" (Hurley, 1999, p. 147).[3]

With reading expectations that begin in grade 1, what is the role of assessment, culture, and community in changing school literacy practices? In response to this question, we first provide an overview of Kosrae today, offering a description of the geographical realities and a historical past that imposed a Western way of learning on a non-Western culture. What follows is how a group of teachers in Micronesia engaged in changing school literacy practices, re-oriented themselves to the Teaching Learning Cycle, collaborated in the development of reading assessments in L1, and involved the community as both resources and participants in a school improvement process that is moving students toward grade-level expectations.

Oral Kosrae: A Rural State With a Colonial Past

Kosrae is one of the four states within the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), a political form of government framed through long years of negotiations between leaders from the U.S. federal government and Micronesia. Kosrae appears on a world map as a dot, at 6 degrees north latitude and 163 degrees east longitude. A very small volcanic island with approximately 42 square miles, this remote area is inhabited by close to 8,000 people.[4]

Worldly contacts to this small island actually began in the early 1800s by the French, although it was sighted first by the Spanish. This contact did not leave much in terms of literacy except that it recorded a lot, resulting in imparting knowledge of Kosrae to the outside world. Similar exploration trips and trading ventures followed. In 1852, a Christian mission ship anchored at one of the island harbors, marking the most influential group in the history of Kosrae. Through the introduction of the Bible came the concept of literacy. Based on the English version brought by the missionaries, a Bible was translated and printed for use in Kosraean. In addition, a mission school was established. Its curriculum included training for church leadership, Bible study, and English. Before this time, people learned only by seeing and listening to elders. Knowledge was passed on through storytelling, chants/songs, and dance (some of these practices were discouraged by the missionaries and therefore no longer exist). Thus, a great change in Kosrae's language and literacy practices began.

Educational legacies from two of four colonial periods are evident in Kosrae's school system today. Japan (1914-1945) was the first to establish schools that included grades 1 through 3 (B. Benjamin, personal communication, August 19, 2002). The curriculum included Japanese language and culture, physical education, and singing. After 3rd grade, the system became selective, sending certain individuals to Pohnpei, a nearby island, or elsewhere to continue their learning. Formal schooling was something new to Kosraeans. Although many began to realize some type of formal educational system, not everyone had the opportunity to experience it. In later years, formal education became a reality.

When the Japanese lost control over the islands in 1945, an outcome of losing World War II, a new administration was brought to Kosrae. Along with it came tremendous change. First, Kosrae was administered by a military government. As a result, Admiral Spruance, the U.S. Commander of the aircraft carrier that battled at Midway, put out several orders, including "Each administration is to start schools and employ islanders as teachers as well as use Americans" (Segal, 1995, p. 165). From this order grew the educational system in Kosrae, patterned after the U.S. educational system. Also resulting from this order was the first school. Initially called the Pacific Island Teacher Training School (PITTS) in Guam, PITTS was later moved to Chuuk and renamed the Pacific Island Central School. Because of this investment, many islanders became teachers; therefore, schools were established throughout Micronesia, including Kosrae. The first public school was then established, headed by Rose Mackwelung. A plan of operation was created and implemented. It included:

- five-day weeks, with a minimum of five hours each day, for 8 months (180 days of school);
- at least 8 grades in each school;
- voluntary (later compulsory) attendance for children ages 6-14;
- vocational education, especially in agriculture and mechanics; and
- a curriculum that included English, health, civics, math, L1, history, geography, and art (Segal, 1995).

With the establishment of teacher training centers and schools based on the U.S. education system came an abundance of teacher training and classroom materials in English, a tradition that continues today.

Kosraeans strongly believe in disseminating information through oral communication. As previously mentioned, information and skills were passed on from generation to generation through oral methods such as storytelling. Storytelling had been the primary means of communicating and transferring knowledge. Because of this, when children entered formal schooling in grade 1, they had developed the skill of listening, but not of speaking and asking questions.

Within these oral traditions are strongly held cultural beliefs. These beliefs can be traced to the fact that a very limited number of print materials could be found in the home or school setting. Having so few printed materials could cause a delay in acquiring reading skills. For example, children who enter 1st grade without receiving any pre-school program do not know their sounds or letters. In addition, due to the lack of print materials, children have little exposure to reading before entering school. Also impacting early literacy is the general tendency for parents to defer academic teaching and learning of children to teachers. In other words, the school, not the community, is presumed responsible for teaching "formal" literacy skills to children. While this is a common expectation, some parents do want to contribute to the literacy learning of their children or help them before they enter school.

Impact of Community-School Connections

Entry into school is thought of as a transition to a more broadly-based community and to a wider range of opportunities for learning. The teacher's responsibility is to know each child and help him or her extend and develop. This requires support from school leadership and local community.

In this particular rural island school, almost 90% of the enrollment includes residents of a small community of families with very strong connections. Through family and community activities, these students know each other prior to school entry. And, in most cases, they already have some knowledge of the cultural norms learned at home in regards to proper behavior in public and the importance of respect, relationships, and responsibilities. They enter school already with connectivity amongst themselves, caring attitudes, and respect for people and school properties. Their sense of family and belonging create school culture. For any observer at the school, evidence of this is easy to find.

- *Student leadership capacity* is nurtured in the classroom and on the playground (e.g., students act as helpers and as group leaders during learning activities or as supervisors at the field during breaks).
- *Respect* for properties is evidenced by vehicles being left unlocked even with valuables in them and school buildings that are free of graffiti.
- *Caring* is practiced and experienced in the classrooms as students take the initiative to help those with learning difficulties (peer dialogues/tutors) and even lend or share crayons and pencils.

Teachers and students connect easily, not only because the principal and some of the teachers are members of their community but because of their home learning experiences.

Children's home learning is unstructured, and the parent/teacher role is a shared responsibility among family members ranging from the very young to the elderly. In a culture that values the extended family and kinship, the parent/teacher role is quite extensive and includes almost the whole community, thus creating an environment that fosters interactive communication and language development. These family or community members are the knowledge holders of the cultural elements of

community life and the extensive vocabularies in relation to the environment. However, such knowledge is a valuable treasure in fragile vessels, passed on orally with variation depending on the generation.

Through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), parents are very active in supporting social and physical issues, such as school picnics, graduation, and grounds maintenance, rather than academic issues. This limitation is not due to lack of desire to boost academic performance but perhaps to current communication strategies and the cultural beliefs that "teachers know better" and that academics is the school's responsibility. What is most interesting is that parents celebrate academic successes quarterly by awarding certificates, notebooks, pens, and pencils to students on the honor roll and to those with perfect attendance. Celebration of success is a component of the school improvement process at this school and with such alignment the connection of school and community is strengthened.

We believe that parents and teachers play an essential role in making text comprehensible for children (Bus, 2001), yet many "Pacific island families say more often that they do not know how to help their children in education" (McNaughton, 2001, p. 49). For too long, parents have leaned on the presumed expertise of teachers, assuming that the school will provide an adequate education for their children. Lines of separation between parent and teacher are often reinforced. Many parents, while confident in oral storytelling, are not familiar with book reading and feel insecure in such literate tasks. At this rural island school, teachers (many of whom are parents in the community themselves) and parents need to share their knowledge of how, for example, parents and children participate in joint story reading (or not).

The importance of sharing school-community expertise in language and reading cannot be underestimated. Kosraean children who engage primarily in oral cultural traditions prior to school may be unprepared for reading and could be considered "at risk." Teachers who draw on shared local knowledge and relations of oral language and literacy that are "unalterably cultural and social" (Watson, 2001, p. 43) instead view these children "with promise" (Skinner, Bryant, Coffman, & Campbell, 1998) and seek to deepen their personal knowledge of each child's differing ways with words (Heath, 1983). This school has strengthened its community-school connection over the year, giving less attention to differentiating between parent and teacher roles, and more attention to working together to educate Pacific children. Building on the strengths of island life in Micronesia and sharing expertise in this way contributes to a '"pedagogy of place" that is unique to Kosrae.

Literacy in the Local Language

Kosraean is the language of home and the language of school, at least until transition into English in grade 3. It is a strong, thriving oral language that effectively addresses communication needs and cultural teaching, with little need for print-based communicative events. What then is the relation between oral traditions and literacy learning in Kosrae? While few would argue that oral language has a role in literacy development, Watson (2001) questions whether there is proof of a direct causal relation. Instead, she raises the point that children need early experiences with oral and written language that engender conversations around word meaning and interpretation – those speech events that elicit discourse patterns, such as inquiry and causal explanation, relevant in literate traditions. For oral language to influence literacy development to a greater extent, such literate traditions need to be elicited in oral communicative events. How oral proficiency in Kosraean supports early literacy and how literacy in the home language supports the later learning of English are questions that we continue to raise and explore in our work at the school.[5]

Children from oral traditions engage in valuable family literacy activities. Expertise is gained through many practices, such as recitation of texts (McNaughton, 1995) and explaining objects of interest (e.g., shells found on the beach) (Watson, 2001). One relevant literacy tradition, a lasting colony legacy in the Kosraean community, is reading the Bible. As a text-based communicative event, Sunday devotion is centered on signification and interpretation of events from the biblical text. An expectation to read the Bible, to say what one knows or has learned from the text, and to be able to describe and explain what was read are literate traditions that began with missionaries more than two hundred years ago. Through these practices, community members, including children, engage in literacy development. What made learning to read in Kosraean so challenging in the past was that the Bible, a sophisticated and complex text, was the first and only book from which they learned to read.

Stemming from that initial experience with print and from more recent exposure to the Western world through telecommunications and other print sources, more text sources are now available. Recording Kosraean myths and creating other stories for children are important to the community. A library service, located at the one high school on Kosrae, is part of the broader FSM library system. It is a place that children frequent regularly, borrowing reading resources in Kosraean and English.

One Pacific Island School in the Process of Change

This study draws from a larger project, Pacific Communities with High-performance In Literacy Development (Pacific CHILD), undertaken by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) in the Pacific region. The Pacific CHILD project is designed to respond to three critical issues identified by Pacific educators: 1) the need to improve student performance in early reading, 2) the need for schools and communities to have better information about how well students are doing, and 3) the need for teachers and administrators to improve their teaching and learning skills by focusing on student achievement. One way the Pacific CHILD project addresses these interrelated issues is supporting teachers' development of early reading assessments for use in their classrooms.

Early Reading Assessment and Local Language Matters

The call for classroom assessment in early literacy development is well established (Caldwell, 2002; Johnston & Rogers, 2001; Rabinowitz, Wong, & Filby, 2002); effective early reading assessment practices can yield valuable information for teachers. The information such practices elicit contributes to individual reading profiles that describe the emerging readers in their classrooms. More significantly, it has the potential to inform instruction and improve early literacy; that is, with evidence of what the child can actually do in particular areas of reading and language, teachers can work toward "closing the gap" between where the child is now and the expectations held for that child by, for example, the end of the grade (Wiliam, 2001).

Kosraean was recorded in alphabetic print by early explorers and missionaries. Its oral character is what children bring to school; they are already familiar with its participatory nature, vibrant inconsistencies, and highly complex phonological markings. The challenge of creating effective early reading assessments in Kosraean lies in the links between a living, oral language and its imposed Greek alphabetic system, which "effectively severed all ties between the written letters and the sensible world from which they were derived" (Abram, 1996, p. 111). The impact of differences between oral and written forms of Kosraean continues to be a challenge in the development of early literacy assessments and has significance for community-school connections.[6]

Pacific CHILD staff recognized the need for multiple sources of evidence (Salinger, 2001) and developed six classroom-based assessments in English that aligned with the Reading First initiative.

They include Concepts About Print, Alphabet Sound and Symbol Recognition, Sight Word Identification, Phonological/Phoneme Awareness, Written Story Construction, and Listen and Retell. Table 1 briefly describes the purpose of each assessment.

Table 1. Early Reading Assessments Developed in Kosraean and Their Purposes

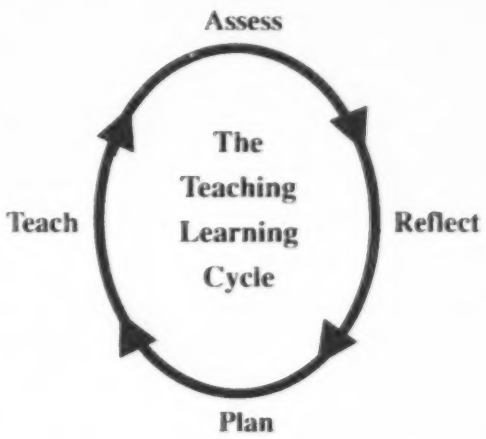
Early Reading Assessments	Purpose of the Assessment
Concepts About Print	To gather evidence of a child's knowledge of certain conventions of print such as the front and back of a book, letters, words, and directionality.
Alphabet Sound and Symbol Recognition	To gather evidence of what letter symbol names and their associated sounds a child knows (which letters and sounds are quickly and easily recognized).
Sight Word Identification	To gather evidence of a child's ability to quickly identify commonly used and frequently occurring words. Many of these are words that cannot be decoded.
Phonological/Phoneme Awareness	To gather evidence of a child's phonological and phoneme awareness (e.g., ability to recognize sounds in words, syllables, rhymes, blends, segmentation).
Written Story Construction	To gather evidence of a child's ability to produce a narrative genre and use appropriate conventions of print such as capitalization and punctuation.
Listen and Retell	To gather evidence of a child's ability to orally recall the story structure and details of a story read aloud.

The assessments were first adapted to Kosraean by the Pacific CHILD reading specialist and then taken to the school and community for collaborative review. Local linguists, central office reading specialists, and teachers engaged in important conversations about language and literacy to improve the quality of the assessments. Validity issues continue to arise, especially with Alphabet Sound and Symbol Recognition because of a changing orthography and with Phonological/Phoneme Awareness because of the syllabic (not phonemic) emphasis of the Kosraean language.

It was important for teachers to understand why assessments *for* learning need to be included in the reading classroom and how assessment information can improve the teaching and learning process. Many teachers have been educated in a system that promotes the assessment *of* learning – testing or assessment that comes at the end of instruction to prove whether or not teaching and learning has taken place (Stiggins, 2002). Assessment *for* learning uses evidence gathered at the beginning of a

teaching cycle to improve student learning. This is a significant shift for teachers; they need to be willing to risk changing how they go about their work in the reading classroom. The Teaching Learning Cycle draws on similar cycles from the Learning Network and from New Zealand.[7] It was introduced as a way to help teachers visualize the shift from testing to assessment and as a common place for teachers to begin conversations about assessing literacy. Three general phases of formative uses of assessment align with the Teaching Learning Cycle:

- Elicit evidence regarding learning (*Assess*)
- Interpret evidence (*Reflect*)
- Follow with appropriate actions (*Plan & Teach*)



The Teaching Learning Cycle is a guide for teachers to learn about the needs and interests of the children in their reading classroom (assess and reflect), so that they can use that information appropriately and effectively (plan and teach). Inquiry is an essential process of the cycle and can be framed by questions such as the ones outlined in Table 2.

Creating the assessments in Kosraean provided opportunities for professional development, especially when considering how oral language features differ from its written form, forcing collaborators to think through what counts in learning to read in Kosraean. For example, when making decisions about which words to include in Sight Word Identification, a common understanding of the term "sight words" was established: most sight words are structure or function words that have no referent (e.g., "the" or "was"); these words are usually more difficult for children to learn than vocabulary (words that have concrete referents such as "dog," or "cat"); and they often have an irregular sound-symbol correspondence, are difficult to decode, and therefore are best learned as a total unit rather than by individual letters or word parts.

The few children's resources available in Kosraean meant giving attention to frequently occurring words in the oral language. Kosraean is a language rich in shortened word forms. The word "tuh" or "tuhsruhk" (its varied oral form) and "tuhsruhktuh" (its written form) is a frequently occurring word (literal English translation – "but," "thus," "therefore/hence"). Questions immediately arose from the discussion. Which form do we use in the assessment? If we use the multi-syllabic written form, it no longer falls within the established definition of a sight word, since "tuhsruhktuh" is easily decodable. Such discussions fostered professional development and provided us an opportunity to share our learning and questioning with parents and community members. This strengthened community-school relations and gave parents (and us) insight into the complexities of learning to read in a language with oral and written forms that have evolved for very different purposes. Collaborative decisions that were understood to be arbitrary were made collectively after lengthy discussions. Assessments were then piloted within a supportive community that put the reading and language development of children first.

Table 2. Questions That Frame the Teaching Learning Cycle

Phases of the Cycle	Teacher Inquiry
Assess	• What do I know about the reading behaviors of the children I teach? • What aspects of reading should I be assessing? • What assessment tools can I use? • How will I collect and record the information?
Reflect	• How do I make sense of the student information? • What does it tell me about the reading behaviors of the children I teach? • How does this information correspond with standards or framework curriculum? • How will this information change what I do in the reading classroom?
Plan	• Based on the information, what should I be teaching next? • What (support, materials) do I need to ensure the plan can succeed? • What reading activities and assessments should I use as I teach? • How can I explicitly teach specific components of reading that the children need?
Teach	• How can I do more of what works and less of what doesn't? • How can I be a reading role model while I teach? • How can I use the space in my reading classroom more effectively while I teach? • How can I organize my classroom time so that I can work with individual readers?

A Pacific Island School on the Move

The Pacific CHILD staff worked with the Department of Education (DOE) in Kosrae, using a pre-established set of criteria to determine the selection of the co-development partner school. Once Sansrik Elementary School was chosen, commitment from the school staff and community was important. The principal, with support of the Pacific CHILD staff, first brought the teachers together to inform them of the decision to place this project at their school. The purpose of the project was explained, followed by an opportunity for teachers to ask questions and raise concerns. The staff had previously identified the need to address literacy at their school.

Therefore, after listening to a presentation of the Pacific CHILD and learning that it was research-based and would focus on professional development in early reading, the staff agreed to give it a try. While there are always visible and silent resistances when any new ideas or change efforts are introduced, since the project was predetermined by the DOE, any verbal suggestion of hesitancy or resistance would indicate a lack of respect. Teachers complied with the decision and did not voice

any concerns. In later meetings, when staff were more familiar and comfortable with the Pacific CHILD staff, they began to ask questions. While they indicated their nervousness about starting something so intensive and extensive, they committed to the project.

Awareness on the part of the director and central office staff of the administrative support and assistance needed in this project was important. In an attempt to develop this deeper awareness and build important relationships, the Pacific CHILD staff provided a more detailed presentation of the project and explained a possible process for improvement. The attendees were unsure of the project, since the process for change that was outlined appeared to them to be demanding. This would be the first time for such an improvement effort to take place in the Kosrae school system. Comments such as "Well, it is just another new thing that will eventually fade out" were expressed by at least one central office staff during this early stage. Mindful of this initial hesitancy, the two site-based Pacific CHILD staff members continued with the start-up work.

It was agreed that parents should be informed of the project. A date was set for such a meeting, and invitations went out to parents and other interested community members. In order to maximize the potential for participation, refreshments were provided. Without food, one cannot expect a good turnout in Kosrae; it is a "must" and a customary cultural practice. More than 60 parents attended the meeting. The Pacific CHILD site-based staff supported the principal in his explanation of the project to the parents during a PTA meeting. The PTA president's verbal request for the support from all in making the project a success was an important milestone. Most of the parents present were very supportive, saying that they saw the project as a positive addition to the school.

Since the school already had established school-community connections, this project nurtured and strengthened the ties between home and school. Involving the community in conversations and professional dialogues that led them to creating a vision and setting goals was important. It was obvious that workshops and work sessions for the community opened the doors to making what happens in the reading classroom more accessible and visible to parents.

Such new experiences excite parents and motivate their children. One mother shared, "After learning from the workshops, I tried to act like a teacher for my children. I schedule TV time and make their study time mandatory. I sit and help with one and then with another. At one time I was making the sound of one letter and my child giggled and said, 'that's not how my teacher said it' and he sounded it out, giving the drag on the 'mmmm.'" This mother's story reflects the strong connection between the child and the teacher. In the work sessions, parents shared how their children viewed the teacher, and not the parent or any other adult, as always being right. The mother shared her anecdote although such change in her house was viewed as unnatural and discomforting. Her husband later supported her by reinforcing study time and participating in helping the children with their homework. Changing home literacy practices in support of the school is difficult work. This parent took a risk and, while it was uncomfortable initially, she began to change her practices. Through this innovation at home, her husband also became involved, strengthening school-community connections for the benefit of his child's early literacy.

School meetings continued to show a high level of participation by the community. One need at the school was for various and numerous forms of materials development in L1. Wanting to remain focused on their changing classroom practices through the professional development provided, teachers suggested that this was one area for parent participation at school. Recognizing the expertise of parents was important; it was felt they could serve as excellent resources given guidance and opportunities for more involvement in their children's learning. Parents were invited to spend time in

the classroom to become familiar with reading routines and expectations that could be extended at home. The Pacific CHILD staff also held literacy workshops for parents to share literacy experiences together and create print materials in Kosraean intended for early reading classrooms.

During an evening meeting hosted by the school, the parents and teachers began brainstorming the school vision. It was a new process for the group, and the parents, in particular, became actively engaged. Some shared their belief that students need more than academic knowledge, that broader educational goals for children can be a shared responsibility between home and community. This was an unexpected and welcomed turning point for the community and school. Previously, it was understood that a clear delineation between teacher and parent roles existed in education. The conversation began to open to collaborative sharing of ideas. One community member offered his definition of a knowledgeable person within the Kosraean context: "He can think and do things with his head; he can use his hands to do things; he has respect/care for others; he knows his culture, and understands the cultural norms which often guide his good behavior."

Teachers and parents talked about the importance of working together to achieve a shared vision for the children at the school. Together, teachers and communities co-constructed their expertise (McNaughton, 2001), developing a shared understanding of what it means to educate children through the exchange of ideas and difficult stories they experience as teachers and parents.

Primary teachers at this school were asked to administer the six early reading assessments at the beginning (entry) and end (exit) of the school year. They were given training and were encouraged to use the teacher recording forms to base further instruction on, therefore addressing the needs of the children in their classroom. This shift is a significant one that takes time, as it requires teachers and students to "live" differently in their classrooms. As part of the process of beginning to re-think how assessment gets done, teachers were encouraged to observe two or three children each day, noting evidence of learning that focused on a specific teaching point. For example, if the assessment information indicated that several children did not know the letters of the alphabet, then the teacher would plan an activity that addressed learning alphabet letter names and while teaching, observe and make notes on pre-selected children's learning. Observation and recording without evaluating is difficult. Its purpose is to inform instructional practices without judgment; it is key to changing practices that address the specific needs in the classroom.

As assessment information was compiled for each of grades 1 through 3, conversations on end-of-grade expectations began to take place, connecting teachers to each other and providing opportunities for input, reflection, and follow-up. These events began linking professional conversations with professional practice, "effecting broader change" (Andrews & Rothman, 2002, p. 2) across the school. Teachers talked about how to support student needs, sharing with each other successful instructional activities that have now impacted more than one classroom. Activities including data collection, technical assistance, and other meetings continued over the next few months and helped to move the school toward important changes that would benefit the education of the children. While the reading specialist continued to work one-on-one with teachers in classrooms, using specific assessment information to meet the needs of individual children and modeling and coaching teachers in early reading curriculum components, the assessment information was being more broadly organized into a bar graph display for use in conversations with teachers across grades and with parents about school performance in early reading.

The bar graphs were shared in different meetings with staff and community. As a result, the teachers decided to focus on writing narratives, which had been identified as an area that needed attention

across grades. Immediately following the setting of the goal, the reading specialist provided professional development sessions on the writing process. The majority of these activities mostly were embedded professional development, in which the specialist spent time in the classroom during instruction and coached teachers as they took risks in trying new ideas in their instructional practices. Teachers were encouraged to be supportive through team teaching, observing each other, and sharing their experiences in the classroom. These activities were not easily carried out since the school had not engaged in this kind of reform before. While assessment scores increased at the end of the school year, there is no claim that professional development innovations were the reason for the increase, even though teachers acknowledged that they tried new approaches to writing narratives in their classrooms.

What was not known initially was that the school was organized departmentally; for example, one teacher was assigned to teach reading to all primary children (grades 1 through 3). A question that arose during the first year, then, was how teachers understand their work in reading. Do they think the sole responsibility of teaching children to read belongs to the reading teacher, or do they think that every teacher is a reading teacher? Evidence of the principal's re-thinking about best practices for literacy instruction came in his eventual decision to move from departmentalized classrooms to "self-contained" classrooms in the early grades. While the departmentalized approach was requested by the central office and favored by many of the teachers, the principal recognized that literacy instruction is the responsibility of all teachers. To support his decision, the site-based staff worked hard to develop a close working relationship with him. As a result, self-contained classrooms are now practiced in the lower grade levels.

One of the ways the principal built relationships with staff and extended his knowledge of literacy and early reading was in visiting classrooms, observing the teachers with a reading "eye," and engaging in conversations with them about their work. Closely linked to the importance of these activities is careful placement of the teacher, who must be aware of which students are ready to change and how he or she can support them in taking risks and experimenting in the reading classroom. This is an essential aspect of moving the school forward.

Starting With One Teacher, One Classroom, and Connections With the Community

School change begins with one teacher in one classroom (Allington & Cunningham, 2002). The teacher in the classroom described in the anecdotes that begin and end this paper is one such teacher. She was willing to experiment with new ideas. She did not always feel successful, but she shared her learning when others inquired. When asked why she kept the children in rows at the onset of the project, she first cited disciplinary reasons. But as she began to reflect on the assessment information and then attend to the varied needs of her students, she soon realized that she wanted more flexibility and movement in her classroom. Rows no longer met her needs as a teacher.

Pacific CHILD staff shared with her varied seating arrangements, including the possibility of using a mat as a gathering place for children. This initiated a conversation with community members, who then agreed to weave a mat using the abundant coconut fronds on the island. Curious about using a mat in the reading classroom, two mothers asked to join the activities. Their participation in a school literacy event helped them to make important community-school connections and perhaps encouraged them to re-think how to engage in literacy events at home with their children. And while children do still sit in rows for some periods during the school day, this teacher has begun to open her reading classroom to varied groupings and other ways of reading.

Using the Teaching Learning Cycle and the six early reading assessments, the reading specialist helped the teacher to link assessment to instruction. Prior to this, the reading classroom often involved only the planning and teaching parts of the cycle. For example, the teacher would plan for the class to first read a story together (students or the teacher read aloud) then complete worksheets that were sometimes related to the story. At the end of that activity, the teacher would plan again without necessarily drawing on what he or she was learning about the students. In the classroom described at the beginning of this paper, the primary print activity upon entry to grade 1 was drawing a picture from the story. In professional development activities, the reading specialist introduced three key reading components to the teacher: Read Aloud, Shared Reading, and Interactive Writing. A Read Aloud activity was modeled, including asking questions at key points before, during, and after the story.

The ensuing discussion on the role of questions in comprehension in an oral culture as a way to elicit prior knowledge and help children learn to make predictions led to re-thinking this literate tradition. Integrating local knowledge of storytelling – the cultural importance of listening and not interrupting the story – was explored. It was decided that the teacher would experiment with listening through her new knowledge of Read Aloud procedures. The reading specialist stood by and coached her, learning with her about a unique rural island tradition that matters. Much learning has yet to be done about the impact of combining two traditions in this way. The importance of this example is that the teacher reflected on what she brought to her new learning and was willing to risk integrating local knowledge with literate traditions for the benefit of the Pacific child.

Attention was also given to the literate classroom, as very little L1 print materials were posted on the walls. In a humid climate with tropical rains and gusting winds, holding materials to the wall was a particular concern. But because of innovations with string and clothespins and a substance called fun tack, teachers began to use the walls to hang print-rich materials. While there is still much to learn about text appropriateness, differentiated print, and how to use these materials in reading events, the walls now display various teacher-, community-, and student-generated print. Other conversations about how books are organized and used within the classroom encouraged this teacher to put the few books she had in baskets and let the children decide how to sort and label them in meaningful ways. It was a starting place for organizing a classroom library that children could manage and care for.

In this reading classroom, the teacher knew the basal reader she was using was inadequate and thus sought the support of the reading specialist for more materials. Parents heard her call for help and wanted to be involved. Materials development workshops were held in the evening. Immersing the parents in their own literacy through writing poetry was the first step. Other materials that reflect cultural traditions such as Kosraean chants, songs, rhymes, and stories are being developed for use in the early reading classroom; while filling a resources "gap," more importantly the activity brought the community and school together for a common purpose, strengthening and deepening their understandings of oral and literate traditions.

The kind of support the reading specialist and site facilitator provided at this school is what Andrews and Rothman (2002) call "connect[ing] professional development to professional practice" (p. 2). Teachers participated in decisions about a school action plan. From their suggestions came individual and small group experiences that focused on modeling and follow-up coaching in the classroom with "real" children. Teachers said they wanted to learn from each other as well, so time was set aside for them to share new learning with colleagues committed to this process. Not everyone participated initially. At this school, only one teacher began to shift her practices. Soon, others became interested in what she was doing. Now many conversations take place amongst colleagues at this rural island school.

Lessons Learned

Responses to improving the literacy of children vary across the sociopolitical landscape of Micronesia. The approach taken by one rural school in Kosrae built upon existing, strong community-school connections in multiple and ongoing ways and recognized these connections as an important source of support in sharing the responsibility of educating Pacific children. It is a reminder that "schools [of excellence in Micronesia] would not have been able to accomplish what they did without strong community support developing over time" (Hezel, 2002, p. 39).

However, strengthening community-school relations is not without difficulty. Only over time did parents and teachers become more open about their concerns, discomforts, and uncertainties invoked in school change. This helped to deepen understandings of how they could work through the difficulties together to best meet the reading needs of the children at the school. While important conversations have begun, fragile ambiguities are ever present in projects such as Pacific CHILD. Ongoing, concerted efforts by all participants are necessary to overcome the difficulties and uncertainties in school change that will inevitably occur.

Three specific activities that initiated change at the school were: 1) developing early reading assessments in L1 through a collaboration between school and community, 2) initiating literacy projects with the community and teachers to extend the number of L1 print resources for the primary grades and engage in literacy activities, and 3) engaging in cross-grade conversations on such topics as rethinking how reading should be delivered (as subject or "across the curriculum") and end-of-year grade expectations for writing. While there were many lessons learned from these and other activities over the year, what is significant is that assessment is an important place to begin conversations on early reading and school change. Highlights of important lessons we believe all schools can benefit from are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Lessons Learned

Changing One Rural Island School's Literacy Practices	
Lesson 1:	Readiness for change must include developing trusting relationships and a willingness to learn together as a team. It requires strong leadership – a principal (or teacher leader) that is ready and open to new ideas, willing to learn with his/her staff and community, and committed to creating the conditions for change. It also requires at least one teacher willing to take risks and experiment with new ideas in her/his classroom.
Lesson 2:	Community members and staff have expertise that needs to be shared. School literacy, based on literate cultural traditions, must be understood in terms of the oral language and literate experiences the child brings to school. When parents and teachers share this knowledge, a closer community-school connection is made in support of the Pacific child.
Lesson 3:	Assessing early reading can be a catalyst for change, connection, and communication at the classroom, school, and community levels.

Lesson 1 – Readiness for Change

Much has been written about the importance of strong community support in engendering a shared respect for education, especially when a school engages in change (Chalker, 1999). Developing relationships and learning to work in partnership with colleagues and community, important in any context, is also situated uniquely in the particular sociocultural expectations of this rural island school. The principal, in Micronesian cultural tradition, is the leader. The creation of a leadership team without the principal is culturally inappropriate and communicatively difficult, as the principal is the ultimate authority of the school, must always be kept informed of teacher discussions, and makes the decisions in the best interests of the school. In Kosrae, the principal has a key role in nurturing important relationships in the process of creating the conditions for school change.

Lesson 2 – Sharing Community-School Expertise

For children to become effective readers, the process must begin early, long before they enter school. The role of family, community, and culture is a significant factor in the ways children are socialized into literacy events, especially in a rural context in which oral cultural traditions are the norm. Attending to discourse patterns found in literate cultural traditions in both oral and literate events at home and in the classroom will move children closer to grade-level expectations. The importance of community-school relations and their interactivity cannot be underestimated. When parents and teachers come together, engaging in the sharing of expertise by learning from each other, children are the benefactors.

Lesson 3 – Assessing the Pacific Child

Early reading assessment has played a multi-faceted role in supporting change, strengthening community-school connections, and improving communication at the classroom, school, and community levels. Initially assessment was introduced to teachers in an effort to inform their practices so that the reading needs of each child could be addressed. Assessing for learning was an unfamiliar concept to most teachers (and to parents). Even when it made sense theoretically, it was difficult to enact because a felt need was to teach first and then assess. During the assessment, teachers wanted the child to succeed and often switched roles from assessor to teacher within one sitting. It was new to them, but they were willing to try and learn from their experiences. This contributed to small but significant changes, as it raised their awareness about what counts in early reading and how to observe and record evidence of what a child can do.

In its desire to discuss and utilize assessment information that matters, this Pacific island school continues to work toward improving communication between teachers within the school and between school and community. Parents are unfamiliar with this approach to learning, and while committed to the project, are uncertain of its use. Traditional assessment routines still hold much sway in the islands. While decisions have not yet been made as to how the assessment information will be shared with parents, what has been learned is that open and inclusive communication within and between school and community is vital to school change.

In (Place of a) Conclusion: Changing Literacy Practices

School staff, immersed in oral cultural traditions of Kosrae and literate cultural traditions of school, committed to a process of change. The school questioned past practices and looked toward a new vision of education for Pacific children. Building on, and drawing from, strong community-school relations and a common understanding that the education of children is a shared responsibility, the principal and staff took a risk and entered into a school improvement process in early reading for the first time.

In the classroom, teachers began with a process of assessment. Assessing early readers helped teachers begin to shift their thinking and alter their routines. This provided opportunities for informing classroom instruction, involving the community and teachers in conversations on literacy and language, and engaging teachers in dialogues about grade-level reading expectations. In the process of collecting assessment information, teachers deepened their awareness of early reading processes and what is required of an early reader. Perhaps more significantly, assessment was the catalyst that ignited important conversations about oral cultural traditions, local knowledge, and links to school literacy, as community members and staff shared their expertise on what counts in learning to read in Kosraean. Most importantly, assessing early literacy has helped teachers come to know each child in their classroom – a key element of effective teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Wilkinson, 1998).

One year later...

The children gather in the corner of the room on a mat that community members have woven. Two parents join them on the mat. The teacher is about to read a story. Before she reads she has the children look at the cover of the book and asks them to tell her what they see. Her questions trigger personal responses, as the children begin to connect their life experiences with the picture on the cover. The teacher is specifically observing two children and records their personal responses. She tells the class the title and asks them to guess what the story is about. As part of the Kosraean story routine, they must listen carefully to the whole story. At the end she asks them if their guess was similar to the story she just read. Suddenly, the rain pours on the tin roof, making her voice almost inaudible. Several papers waver momentarily from the gusts of wind but remain secured to the wall. The books, organized in labeled baskets, show evidence of curled and tattered pages, more from use than from the dampness of the rain. While still on the mat, she prompts the children to extend meaning beyond the story. The bell rings and the school day is over. She encourages the children to continue the reading conversations at home. A few minutes later, she runs out of her classroom to a pre-arranged meeting with the other primary teachers, ready to share the literacy practices she is trying out in her classroom.

Moving early readers toward grade-level expectations is not easy. Difficulties in rural island schools may often seem insurmountable, and "educators may be tempted to throw up their hands and write off schools as a foreign innovation incompatible with island culture and its management style" (Hezel, 2002, p. 38). Yet, in at least one island classroom, one teacher, with the support of her school and community, is willing to take risks and experiment with new ideas. Slowly her assessment and literacy practices are changing. Children are beginning to incorporate new forms of knowledge, based on oral and literate cultural traditions, into their expanding repertoire of language and reading experiences. No longer a "restricted project," this reading classroom offers distinctive literacy learning opportunities. The interplay of oral culture and text-based communication – oral language influencing and being influenced by literacy – has invoked a pedagogical gift, the cultural risk and promise of educating Pacific children.

Rural island schools, such as this one in Kosrae, have the opportunity to create a pedagogy of place as they work toward informed practices that are built on what matters in language and reading to the school and community. Hezel (2002) comments, "Formal education, once grafted from an alien plant, has taken root in island Micronesia and bears rich fruit in at least some places" (p. 39). We believe this rural island school in Kosrae has the potential to be such a place.

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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank those that gave their time to read and provide valuable feedback on this manuscript. Especially, we would like to thank the principal, teachers, community members, and children of one rural island school in Kosrae. The privilege of working with and learning from them was the impetus for this document.

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[1] Watson (2001) suggests that any definition of literacy must include "a set of skills for decoding and producing written symbols, ...an interpretive competence with many forms of representation and communication" (p. 51).

[2] Gee (2002) speaks of routines as a "normed" activity, the result of "assembling" situated meanings that are "always relative to socioculturally defined experiences... by the sociocultural groups to which [we] belong and with whom [we] share practices" (p. 123). What it means to teach reading for this teacher has been learned through the experiences she has had with reading (learning to read and learning to teach reading) and how other teachers in her school and community practice the teaching of reading.

[3] Hurley (1999) speaks of the need to "encourage rural schools to build a distinctive 'pedagogy of place' that rejects standardization and provides direct benefits to rural students and communities" (p. 147). Rather than taking on the same structures as urban schools, rural schools build on the local resources to meet the needs of rural children.

[4] The U.S. Census Bureau defines "rural" as an area of fewer than 1000 inhabitants per square mile.

[5] One of the intentions of this paper is to raise some of the complicated literacy issues faced by teachers not only at this rural island school but at schools across the nation. Such language and literacy issues are important and require ongoing inquiry beyond the scope of this paper.

[6] If at home and in the community children learn through traditional teaching stories while simultaneously learning to speak within such specific and situated storied experiences, how does this context relate to the assessment of early reading practices at school? How do schools help children make the links between their rich experiences with story, their already habitual "mimetic thought patterns of oral culture," and the learning of a written alphabetic system that was intended to disrupt and interrupt "the way culture preserves itself" (Abram, 1996, p. 109). Learning to read relies heavily on the oral language experiences a child brings to school. The importance of coming to know the children we teach, the language and cultural traditions they bring to the classroom, and how that impacts their experiences with print literacy in L1 and subsequent languages learned cannot be ignored. The activity of creating early reading assessments in the local language may be a venue through which these important issues can be addressed.

[7] Reading for life (1997) introduced an Assessment Learning Cycle that viewed assessment as an "on-going and natural part of the reading program" (p. 54).

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This product was funded by the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. ED) under the Regional Educational Laboratory program, award number ED01CO0014. The content does not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. ED or any other agency of the U.S. government.

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